MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
(Formerly Bureau of Health)
11 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Phone 1-800-821-5821 / Fax 207-287-7443

ALERT - Important Information

2007PHALT001

TO: Health Departments, Long Term Care Facilities, Hospitals, Emergency

Departments, Infection Control Practitioners, Schools, Day Care Centers, Rural

Health Centers, County EMA, EMS, Home Health Agencies, Hospital

Associations, Maine Lab Facilities, Maine Primary Care, MEMA, State & Federal

Agencies, Public Health, Vets

FROM: Dora Anne Mills, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Director

SUBJECT: Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (Red Tide) Illnesses – Washington County

DATE: August 1, 2007

TIME: 11:30AM

PAGES: 3

PRIORITY: Review

Confidentiality Notice: This fax message is intended for the exclusive use of the individual or entity identified above. It may contain information, which is privileged and/or confidential under both state and federal law. If you are not notified otherwise, any further dissemination, copying, or disclosure of the communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this transmittal in error, please immediately notify us at 287-3252 and return the original transmission to us by mail at Key Bank Plaza, 6th Floor-286 Water Street. Augusta, ME 04333, without making a copy. Your cooperation in protecting confidential information is greatly appreciated.

Health Alert

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (Red Tide) Illnesses – Washington County

<u>Summary</u>: Four persons from a Washington County fishing household were hospitalized with symptoms of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) on the evening of July 31th within several hours of sharing a meal of mussels. Preliminary testing of mussels taken from the home were highly contaminated with the toxin that causes paralytic shellfish poisoning. These preliminary tests show toxin levels 200 times the threshold level used to close shellfish beds in Maine. Maine CDC is now assisting the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) to determine the source of the implicated mussels and to assure that any harvested shellfish available to the public continue to be safe to eat. Early information indicates the probable source of the mussels was a drifting barrel found by the lobsterman off the Washington County coast; not from a mussel bed. This information also indicates the mussels taken off the barrel were for the lobsterman's personal use.

Clinical providers should be aware of the signs and symptoms of PSP and should call the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 if they need consultation on diagnosis and management problems. All suspect cases should also be reported immediately to the Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

<u>Background</u>: Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) – also called red tide – is a marine biotoxin that is associated with certain types of algae blooms in coastal waters. Bivalve shellfish eat and filter the toxic algae, and the concentrations of the toxin can cause serious illness or death if eaten by humans. The Maine DMR monitors shellfish beds closely and closes areas to shellfish harvesting if levels of PSP are noted to be high. Because of this well developed system, there have been no documented cases of human PSP in Maine since at least 1980. This testing and closure system coupled with law enforcement has a long history of successfully preventing consumers from being exposed to shellfish from areas closed because of red tide.

Consumers concerned about obtaining safe shellfish should buy from certified shellfish dealers.

Clinical effects:

Mild: paresthesias of tongue, lips and throat which may spread to face, neck, arms, fingers, toes; headache; nausea (gastrointestinal effects may not be noted)

Moderate: weakness of limbs, ataxia, incoherent speech, difficulty breathing; floating sensation and giddiness; dizziness; rash; fever; tachycardia and hypertension; dyspnea; **Severe:** choking sensation, severe respiratory difficulty/failure (usually within 12 hours).

Onset: 30 minutes to 10 hours (usually within 2 hours)

Duration: hours to days; muscle weakness may last weeks

Treatment: if patients present soon after ingestion, consider lavage and activated charcoal; symptomatic/supportive; possibly IV fluids and sodium bicarbonate

Shellfish that may be <u>unsafe</u>:

- Clams [Soft Shell, Hard Shell (Quahogs), Surf or Hen]
- Mussels
- Oysters (both American and European)
- Quahogs
- Snails
- Whelks

•

Odor and taste are unaffected. The toxins are **heat stable** and **water soluble**. Cooking/freezing will not destroy the toxins. Cooking broth may contain toxins.

Fish are usually <u>safe</u> (need to call the NNEPC to check, not all-inclusive):

- Crab (eat only cleaned and picked muscle tissue, not whole crabs)
- Lobster (avoid tomalley)
- Scallop meats
- Shrimp
- Finfish

Recommendations:

- 1. Clams, mussels and other bivalves should not be consumed unless they are known to have been harvested from shellfish beds that have not been closed for red tide. Consumers concerned about obtaining safe shellfish should buy from certified shellfish dealers.
- 2. Medical providers should be familiar with signs and symptoms of PSP and should maintain a high index of suspicion for persons who have consumed mollusks during the 10 hours preceding onset of illness. Clinical consultation is available 24 hours per day through the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.
- 3. Suspect cases of PSP should be reported immediately to the Maine CDC/DHHS at 1-800-821-5821.

FMI:

 $http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/pspclosures.htm \\ \underline{www.mainepublichealth.gov}$